

Statement by Vladimir Petrovsky
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva
on the occasion of the exhibition entitled:
“From Versailles to Locarno- from an imposed to a negotiated Peace”
(1919-1925)

Monday, 20 November 2000, 18.30
Palais des Nations, Salle XII, Door 17, 3rd floor

Mr. President,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Palais des Nations this evening for this exhibit commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Locarno Conference. I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to His Excellency, Mr. Adolf Ogi, the President of the Swiss Confederation for the honor of his presence here tonight and also to the Government of Switzerland, the Locarno Conference's host country, for their efforts in making this event possible. This exhibit has also been supported by the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of the Czech and Slovak Republics (Czechoslovakia), France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Poland, the countries that contributed to the Locarno agreements, to which we also pay tribute.

The Locarno Conference, which was held 75 years ago from 5th-16 October 1925, was clearly one of the major contributions to European reconciliation and peace of its time. When European politicians and diplomats met in the Swiss town of Locarno, they rose above national antagonisms after World War I to find common ground and renounced the use of force in favor of a policy of cooperation.

Germany freely recognized its borders with France and Belgium, as well as the demilitarization of the Rhineland, fixed by the Treaty of Versailles. It made a commitment not to rearm this zone and not to change its western borders by force. Great Britain and Italy were the guarantors of these agreements. Germany was promised a permanent seat in the Council of the League of Nations. To perfect this system of collective security, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany and Poland were obliged to settle their disputes by arbitration.

The Locarno agreements -- the nine documents initialed in Locarno on 16 October and signed in London on 1 December 1925 -- represent the first exercise in collective efforts as envisaged in the Covenant of the League of Nations. Locarno proved that multilateral diplomacy can obtain tangible results and that good leadership was and is, without a doubt, an essential ingredient of successful

diplomacy. It is evident that the success of the Locarno Conference was due in no small part to Aristide Briand, the French Foreign Minister in the Second Cartel government, to Gustav Stresemann, Foreign Minister in the Weimar Republic and to Austen Chamberlain, Foreign Secretary of Great Britain at that time.

In facilitating the holding of the Locarno Conference on its territory, Switzerland, which joined the League of Nations, demonstrated its commitment to peace and mediation. This exhibit serves to provide us with a clear reminder of Switzerland's role, not only as host country of the first international organization dedicated to the promotion of collective security, but as an active member within it. Swiss membership in the League of Nations was in line with the country's long tradition of internationalism and democracy, together with the racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic tolerance which have always been trademarks of the Swiss Confederation.

We are very pleased to host this exhibit at the Palais des Nations and hope that it will facilitate the understanding of the important role of multilateralism in promoting peace and reconciliation, as incarnated at the Locarno Conference!

Thank you for your attention.